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Brooke F Adams 08/06/2006 02:03:50 PM From DB/Inbox: Brooke F Adams

Cable
Text:

UNCLAS CAIRO 04676

SIPDIS
CXCAIRO:
ACTION: REFC
INFO: IPS DCM POL CONS

DISSEMINATION: REFU
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PO
DRAFTED: REF:GCHEYNE
CLEARED: NONE

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RR RUEHC RUEHAS RUEHRB RUEHRO RUEHNC RUEHCL
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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0236
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 0270
INFO RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 0436
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 1379
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 0022
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 0208
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0311
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 004676

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FROM REGIONAL REFUGEE COORDINATOR
DEPT FOR PRM/AFR MARY LANGE, PRM/MCE, PRM/A WHITNEY REITZ, NEA/MAG
GENEVA FOR RMA
ROME FOR FODAG

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [AL](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: SAHRAWIS: ANOTHER FOOD CRUNCH IN TINDOUF

References: (A) Cheyne/Lange emails; (B) 05 Cairo 07582; (C) 05
Cairo 07889

11. (U) This message has been cleared by Embassy Algiers.

Summary

12. (SBU) Cairo-based Regional Refugee Coordinator Cheyne met separately with WFP representative Marius de Gaay Fortman, and UNHCR Representative Peter van der Vaart, in Algiers July 27. WFP is concerned that a break in the Tindouf food pipeline is imminent with significant shortfalls expected for the balance of CY2006. With little support from UNHCR, WFP is on a collision course with the Government of Algeria over the question of camp numbers as it attempts to negotiate a WFP/UNHCR/Red Crescent tripartite agreement for ongoing food aid deliveries when the current Protracted Refugee and Recovery Operation (PRRO) expires at the end of this month (August). WFP has proposed to the GOA that the current arrangement (with WFP supplying sufficient food for 125,000) will continue to the end of CY2006 but unless agreement is reached on numbers WFP will revert to 90,000 as the base figure and cut supplies accordingly. It is unlikely the GOA and the Sahrawis will agree to this figure. UNHCR seems to have little stomach for confronting the problems that beset the food aid program and may find some of its

programs supplanted by UNICEF activities in future.

Background

13. (SBU) Cairo-based Regional Refugee Coordinator Cheyne met separately with WFP representative Marius de Gaay Fortman, and UNHCR Representative Peter van der Vaart, in Algiers July 27, for an update on food supplies for the Sahrawi refugees in the Tindouf camps. The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) is currently considering food aid funding for the Western Saharan refugees.

14. (SBU) A major concern in the past has been the lack of control over food aid distribution from the Rabouni warehouse area in Tindouf to the four camps in the surrounding desert. Although UNHCR is nominally responsible for food distribution from Rabouni, it was apparent when RefCoord visited Tindouf last September that UNHCR has surrendered control to the Sahrawi government-in-exile through the Sahrawi Red Crescent (CRS). Under this arrangement there is no tracking of food after CRS takes the food from Rabouni. The problem has been further compounded by huge discrepancies in the various estimates of the camp populations, and the refusal by the Sahrawis and the GOA to permit a census or registration of camp inhabitants. This has led to allegations of food diversion (possibly to support Polisario forces). WFP food has appeared in the markets of Tindouf, Mauritania and Mali, supporting these allegations. Uncertainty about the numbers has also provoked persistent allegations of "double funding" by the Algerian Red Crescent (CRA), a major conduit for aid to the Sahrawi (CRA receives funding from over 30 different donors).

Uncertain Numbers

15. (SBU) The Sahrawis and the GOA have for years maintained there are 158,000 people in the camps and this figure has been the yardstick for food and other aid requirements. But satellite imagery obtained by the Europeans in 2005 suggested there were around 90,000 camp inhabitants and UNHCR and WFP cut back food supplies accordingly. The issue is still unresolved. After severe flooding in the area earlier this year UNHCR/WFP established a compromise formula whereby they would continue to supply sufficient food for 90,000 of the most vulnerable camp inhabitants plus additional food to assist an estimated 35,000 flood victims. The Sahrawi and the GOA have not accepted that the new aggregate figure of 125,000 reflects actual camp numbers, insisting instead that the population remains at 158,000. The Sahrawis say they are managing the supposed shortfall by reducing per capita allocations (e.g., they say refugees are getting 10.7 kg of wheat flour instead of the WFP allocation of 13.5kg).

Pipeline Break

16. (SBU) With no resolution of these issues in sight, WFP's Fortman painted a dismal picture of a fragile hand-to-mouth food pipeline as reduced contributions by regular donors Spain, Canada, France and the U.S., have this year failed to match program needs. Although EC support has remained steadfast, and Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Ireland have provided additional donations, the pipeline currently shows a shortfall to the end of the CY2006 of 7,836MT of wheat flour, 1,242MT of pulses, 602MTMT of vegetable oil, 648MT of sugar and 116MT of high energy biscuits. Malnutrition levels remain high with continuing deficiencies of micronutrients, animal protein, (meat, milk) and fresh fruit (although ECHO has just donated Euros 2m for fresh fruit for the remainder of the CY).

Crunch Time Ahead

17. (SBU) WFP intends to extend the current Protracted Refugee and Recovery Operation (PRRO), due to expire on August 31, to the end of CY2006. A Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) is tentatively planned for September but may be postponed until late October/November (i.e.,

until after Ramadan). The findings of the JAM will be used as the basis for a new 2007-2008 PRRO, where the major issue will once again be the numbers. Neither Fortman nor Van der Vaart expects the numbers issue to be resolved for the new PRRO. They point out that support for registration/census among donors is uneven and UNHCR itself has little motivation to support pressure for an agreement on numbers since its aid programs are focused largely on infrastructure and targeted camp populations and are not determined by aggregate numbers. Negotiations for a tripartite agreement for aid distribution between UNHCR, WFP and the CRA have been stalled because the draft agreement uses 90,000 as the base figure for needs assessment.

18. (SBU) In the absence of any clear consensus on numbers, WFP is facing a crunch in its efforts to establish a new project document with the GOA to take it beyond August 31. Fortman says WFP has little support from the UN in forcing the issue and faces opposition from the GOA - which also happens to be a major donor (about Euros 15m a year). Through its regional office in Cairo, WFP has advised the GOA that it will extend the current program of supplying food for 125,000 until the end of the CY, but that it would prefer to base future food aid on agreed figures. If agreed numbers are not forthcoming by January WFP will revert to 90,000 as the basis for food distribution.

UNHCR's Performance

19. (SBU) Following our visit to Tindouf last September we reported that UNHCR's Algeria mission seemed to be in disarray. It had poor relations with WFP, the two senior officers in Algiers and the nutritionist in Tindouf had left the country, the Head of the Tindouf sub-office seemed disengaged and its supplementary feeding programs appeared to be ineffectual. There have been some improvements. There is a new representative (Peter Van der Vaart). The Head of the Tindouf sub-office has been moved to Geneva and a replacement has been named (Alessandra Morel) although she has yet to take up the position. A new Junior Protection Officer (JPO) position in Tindouf has just been filled and there are hopes that the Tindouf office will now take a more active role in monitoring the activities of the CRS and CRA in the field. There is a new sense of amity between WFP and UNHCR although WFP's Fortman is openly critical of UNHCR's apparent lack of interest in engaging the GOA over the need to settle the numbers issue and to establish a sound foundation for subsequent food aid programs. Fortman also commented that UNICEF was aggressively trying to carve out a role in Tindouf and might take over from UNHCR some responsibility for supplementary feeding programs in future.

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